

**LET'S TALK
TURKEY!**

A Guide to Raising Turkey Poults

Backyard Poultry Contributor • March 18, 2016

There are many reasons raising turkey poults is rewarding. Turkeys are very social and inquisitive. They can make excellent additions to your backyard flock, and will reward your husbandry efforts with many funny antics. For those of you experienced with brooding day old chicks, the primary differences in brooding poults are: poults are slower to learn where to eat; poults are more apt to pileup in corners; poults are more easily frightened; and poults are more easily chilled.

POULT BEHAVIOR

For the first week of raising turkey poults, you'll notice they sleep for hours at a time. Sleep will be followed by short periods of time of brisk activity, and then more sleep. Happy, healthy poults will be active when awake and will tend to move a short distance away from you or your hand as it enters the brooder. Young toms are usually bolder, and will be the first to stand their ground or to peck at some new object.

Poults that are lethargic usually are suffering from something, like: too little to drink, too little to eat, a bacterial infection (in the case of a poult whose navel do not seal up completely prior to hatch), too little warmth, or a brooder disease like coccidiosis.

Brooding

When raising turkey poults, we need to have a building clean and ready for the poults with brooders up to temperature and running for a few days to ensure they are working properly. There should be a brooder located more or less centrally in the house, and the corners should be rounded by use of boards or a brooder ring — this removes corners in which poults can become trapped by other poults.

Corners are the site of most brooder pileups. Use of a round barrier, shaped into a ring around the brooder, made of cardboard or wire, is important to keep the poults near the brooder, feed and water for the first week. The brooder ring can be moved back gradually as the poults grow — each week the ring is enlarged so as to give the poults more room and they are encouraged to spend more time outside the brooder by moving the waters and feeders further out as well.

Brooder temperature should be 95 degrees Fahrenheit and the poults should have the ability to move away from the heat source to prevent over heating. The general rule of thumb is to reduce the temperature of the brooder by 5 degrees (F) per

week, though many producers maintain one brooder temperature and simply give the poults more space away from the brooder. Heat source for the brooder is usually suspended, often 18 to 24 inches above the bedding material. Care must be taken to ensure the bedding is not over-heated as fire can result.

When brooder temperature is ideal for raising turkey poults, they will spread out with some under the brooder, some outside it. When too hot, the poults will tend to lay in a ring as far away from the brooder as possible. When the brooder temperature is too low, the poults will lay in a tight group under the brooder.

Feeders and Waterers

The brooder should contain more than one waterer and feeder, and these should be spread out evenly so that all poults will have equal access to food and water. Waterers should be placed on platforms of screen or slats nailed to a wooden frame to raise the waterer above the shavings. Waterers should have a narrow lip containing the water; this style of lip prevents the poults from becoming wet and then possibly dying from chilling. Open water containers should not be used. Poults can drown in open water bowls and pans. Newspaper can be placed around the feeders to prevent the poults from eating shavings.

Cautions

For the first few days of a poult's life we need to worry about dehydration, chilling, crop impaction, wet litter, and pile ups. These are the issues that most often lead to complications and death.

Dehydration is the #1 killer of poults in the first three days. The best prevention is to simply dip each poult's bill in the water as you place them into the brooder area. In this way a large number of the poults will learn to drink and then will teach most of the rest. Check the poults every few hours for the first three days. Any that seem sluggish should have their bills dipped in the water to be sure they are drinking.

Having a good brooder, set at the proper temperature will go a long way toward preventing chilling. Additionally, we should check the poults every few hours the first three days to ensure that they all spend time under the brooder; if you find a few resting away from it, move them under the brooder by hand.

Crop impaction is a result of eating the bedding, usually comprised of pine shavings, instead of the feed. To help prevent poults from mistaking shavings for feed, it is a good idea to place newspaper under the feeders for the first week. Some producers use boards or cardboard under the feeders for the first week or two. The idea is to

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in the brooder/brooder house as a part of pileup prevention. Rounding out the corners gives fewer locations where a turkey poult can become trapped. Light is helpful as a preventive as poults tend to pileup more frequently in the dark.

Roosting

Poults can be encouraged to roost at an early age. From the first week on, most producers will provide access to a low roost so that poults can fly up to explore and to satisfy their natural instinct to roost. A roost also has the benefit of reducing the feeling of crowding by reducing the number of birds actually on the floor at any given time.

Plan to allow a minimum of 4 inches of roosting space for each poult. Important is to keep the roost low, maybe six inches from the floor, to start and as the poults' grow their wing feathers, raise the roost to a foot or more.

Maturing Poults

When raising turkey poults, you'll find they will become strong and large quickly by the end of the first three weeks. Be prepared to change to large, harder to knock over feeders and waters. Anticipate this need and their increasing quantities of food and water.

By three weeks juvenile flight feathers will be fully emerged. At this time you will know that you have passed one of the major points in a young turkey's life.

After eight weeks, poults may be fed a ration lower in protein. Grains can be fed along with the same higher protein mash, but in different hoppers so as to prevent billing out mash to get to the grain. Oats and corn are excellent grains for turkeys. Oats in particular are excellent and help turkeys grow strong bones, thus prevent bone deformities, as well as prevent feather picking. You can talk with your local feed store to discuss your overall goal for your turkey project to determine what feed you will need.

Conclusion

All in all, the first three weeks of raising turkey poults is the most challenging. Empty and refill the waterers at least once per day, preferably twice. Be sure that the waterers and feeders are clean.

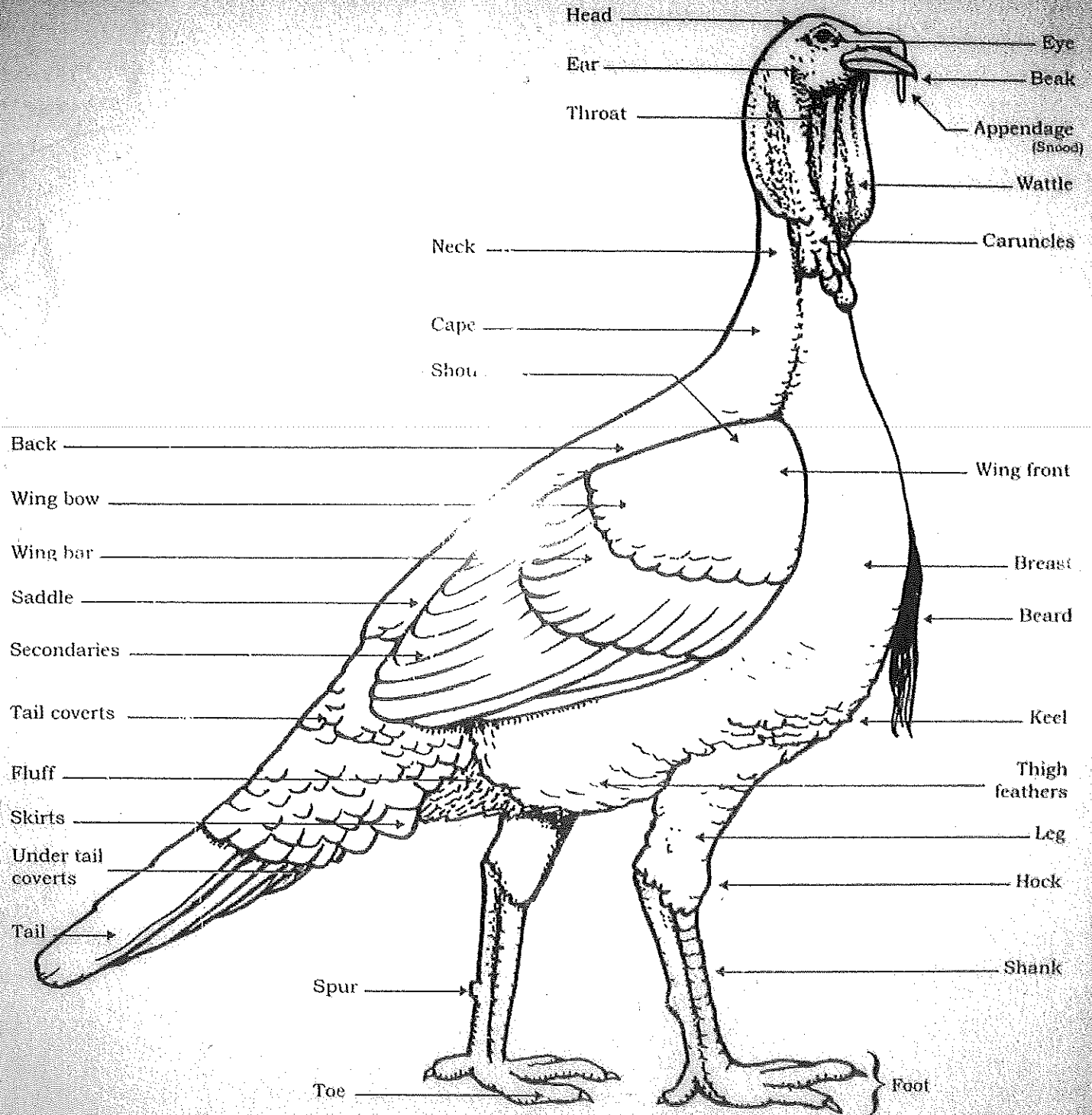
Stir the litter in the brooder at least once per day. Each time you visit, add a handful of litter to areas that receive heavy fouling, such as under the heat source. Success with turkeys is dependent upon mastering good brooder husbandry. Observation is the key element to good husbandry. Go and watch your turkeys, often, and spend

time with them. Learn their natural behaviors. Identify odd behavior — such as a lone turkey standing by itself, possibly in a corner. If you can raise your turkeys past the brooder stage up to the period of moving them to pasture, then you have passed most of biggest challenges to raising turkeys.

The old-timers used to say, “Well hatched is half raised.” To this I would add the comment, “Properly brooded is well raised.” Good luck raising turkey poults!

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Parts of a Turkey



WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

POULT—baby turkeys of both sexes

TOM—male turkey of any age

GOBBLER—also a male, but usually used to describe a mature tom

HEN—female turkey of any age

RANGE—a field of grasses, legumes, or other plants used as a pasture for turkeys

DRY LOT—an area where turkeys are outside on soil without vegetation; not recommended

RANGE SHELTER—a building where turkeys find shelter from sun, rain, and snow, and protection from predators; often moveable

FOUNTAIN—a metal, glass, or plastic device used to water turkeys; it dispenses water from a storage area as it is consumed.

BREAST BLISTER—a sore or calloused area on the bird's breast

PIN FEATHER—a small immature feather

FINISH—the quality of carcass perfection; it includes freedom from blemishes and pin feathers, and having neither too much or too little fat

DOWN—the fuzzy fur-like covering on a baby bird

CROP—a temporary holding area for food and water in the turkey's digestive system. Its location is over the wish bone in the upper breast of a turkey, chicken, or other bird. It stores and prepares food for further digestion

GIZZARD—the part of the bird's digestive system which receives the contents of the crop and grinds the food into small particles as an aid to digestion

CROP BOUND—a condition where food (usually long cut grass, litter, or other dry bulky feed) becomes impacted (stuck) in the crop; this condition can extend to the gizzard

PARASITE—a creature that lives inside or on another organism. There are internal parasites, like worms, and external parasites, like lice and mites. Both can affect the health and well-being of turkeys

VITAMIN MINERAL ELECTROLYTE MIX—a combination of essential vitamins and minerals added to the water supply to help meet the need for them in the turkeys' diet; this is very important when feed supplies aren't fresh enough or turkeys are undergoing stress

CANNIBALISM—an abnormal behavioral condition usually started by stress. Turkeys may pick toes, feathers, vents, or other body parts until they bleed. It can result in severe damage or death, and is difficult to stop.

EVISCERATION—the removal of the internal organs (entrails) of a bird slaughtered for market

DRESSED—refers to the process involved in preparing a live bird for the oven or other means of cooking; fresh dressed birds have not been frozen or otherwise preserved

BROODING—supplying the proper conditions necessary to grow turkey poults, chicks, or other young birds from hatching until they are feathered

HOVER—a device used to cover and supply heat to baby poultry

COMPLETE RATION—a mixture of feed ingredients which supplies correct amounts of all the nutrients needed by the animal or bird. It usually contains grains and other plant parts, food processing by-products, vitamins, minerals, and sometimes medications. It could include pasture plants, commercially prepared feeds, or home mixes of grain.

Feed Form Terms:

PELLET—a compressed, rod-like unit of ground feed for older birds

BITS OR CRUMBLES—broken or crumbled pellets used for starter and grower rations

MASH—finely ground grains and other food most often used for baby chick starters

GRAIN—a seed such as wheat, corn, or oats

External Anatomy of the Turkey

TAIL FEATHERS OR RECTRICES

There are usually 18 present, but a gobbler can lose a few when fighting. Tan- to brown-tipped on Eastern, Rio Grande and Osceola subspecies; ivory-tipped on Merriam's.

EAR OPENING

No flap to funnel sounds, but a tom hears extremely well.

HEAD CROWN

Predominantly white during the spring, sometimes with a reddish tint.

EYE

Set into the side of the head for monocular vision; a slight turn of the head allows a 360 degree field of vision.

TAIL COVERTS

Tip colors vary with subspecies.

SNOOD

Long and prominent on a mature gobbler, but no known function.

BACK AND BODY FEATHERS

Provide insulation and shed water. When upraised they refract sunlight to add to a strutting tom's grandeur.

MAJOR CARUNCLES

Large and fleshy. Engorged with blood during the spring.

PRIMARY WING FEATHERS

Marked by distinctive white bars (less barring on the Osceola). Toms rub off wing tips with extended strutting.

BREAST FEATHERS

Black tips give a gobbler a coal-black appearance.

SPUR

Most spurs are black, some have red or blond tints. They appear as a short button on a jake; just less than a one-inch straight spur on a two-year-old; and as a sharp, curved, one-inch or longer spur on a three-year-old tom.

BEARD

Three to four inches on a jake; seven to nine inches on a two-year-old; and 10 inches or longer on a three-year-old gobbler. Thickness varies. Some toms have multiple beards.

FOOT

Three long toes. The middle toe measures 2 1/2 to 3 1/4 inches on a gobbler.

Know the Difference Between Hens & Gobblers

It's easy to distinguish a gobbler from a hen by differences in their size, color, heads, and other characteristics.

Source: NWTF

Adult males have a naked, heavily carunculated (bumpy) head that normally is bright red but turns to white overlaid with bright blue when the birds are excited.

Other distinguishing features of the common turkey are a long red fleshy ornament (called a snood) that grows from the forehead over the bill, which elongates to 3 or more inches when displaying; a fleshy wattle growing from the throat; a tuft of coarse, black, hairy feathers (known as a beard) projecting from the breast; and more or less prominent leg spurs.

Female turkeys have pale pinkish-red head and neck features. They will display their tail feathers, while strutting on occasion, but not nearly as often or as significantly as males. They may have small, usually blunt spurs and sometimes, a small beard. Their snood seldom elongates more than 1/2 - 1 inch in length. Wattles are relatively small and pale colored.

mended 4 square feet of floor space per bird, a brooder house 10 feet by 10 feet will hold 25 birds.

You may brood an average project of 20 to 25 turkey poults under an infrared bulb (250 watts). Suspend it at least 18 inches above the litter. For larger flocks you may need to buy a commercially made hover with built-in temperature controls. Whatever the heat source, turn it on 18 to 24 hours before you expect the baby turkeys so the coop has a chance to warm up.

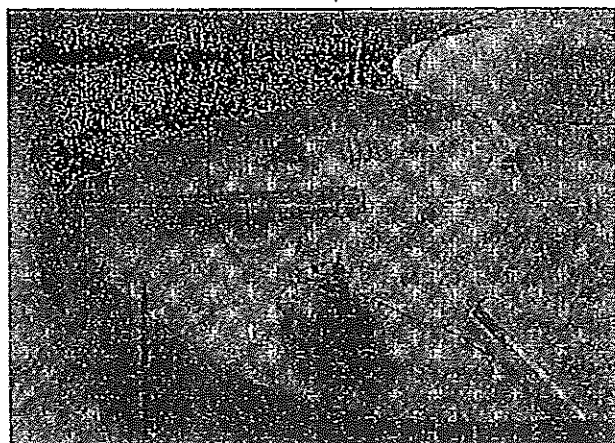
The temperature under the light or hover should be about 90° F during the first week. Reduce the temperature by 7° F per week until you reach 70° F by raising or otherwise adjusting the heat source. Once the poults are well feathered or the weather is warm you may stop providing heat. It is very easy to tell if brooding temperatures are correct. If it is too warm, the poults will move away from the heat source and pant. Cold poults gather in the warmest area and chirp loudly. Happy youngsters will spread out over the floor area feeding, drinking, and resting, and making soft chirping sounds. If they all gather to one side, check for a draft.

Make sure that your brooder coop or shelter will keep out rats, weasels, cats, and snakes.

FEEDING TURKEYS

If your turkey project is to be successful, you must pay close attention to feeds and feeding. A good quality fresh commercial turkey ration is usually the most economical. You must, however, know what the turkeys require at each stage of their development and make ration changes as necessary. To prevent crop binding, feed granite grit of an appropriate size from 12 days of age to marketing. This is especially true for birds on range or pasture.

Be careful to avoid wasting feed. Adjust feeding equipment properly, and keep it in good repair. Don't ignore the damage rats and mice can cause. Just two rats can eat or destroy 100 pounds of feed in a year. Since it takes less than 50 pounds of feed to produce one 18-pound turkey, it is easy to see the need for rat control. Turkeys will waste very little feed if you fill the



This brooding area is ready for new poults. A brooder guard prevents drafts from reaching poults and keeps them near the heat source (hover, top right corner). Feeders and automatic hanging waterers are arranged in a wheel pattern.

hoppers often, but never more than half full. Adjust self feeding equipment to produce similar results.

The following schedule will serve as a feeding guide. Be sure to keep fresh feed and water in front of your flock always.

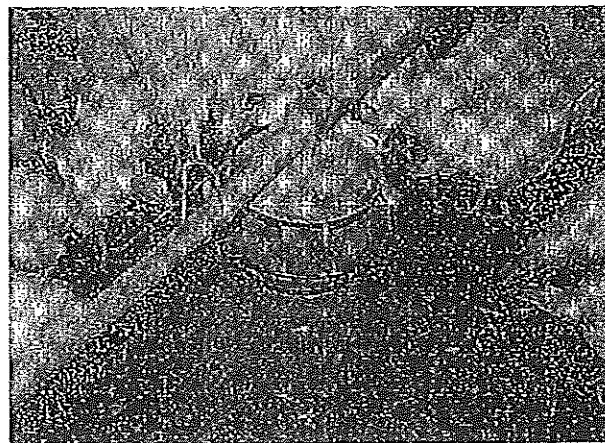
Age of turkeys	What to feed
1 day to 7 weeks	Turkey starter with 26 to 30% protein
7 to 14 weeks (At the end of this period hens should be ready for market)	Turkey grower or developer with 16 to 24% protein
More than 14 weeks	Stay with the grower-developer or change to a finisher of 14 to 16% protein. Finisher is not recommended if the birds tend to fatten easily. Substitute whole oats for up to 20% of the finishing ration if the turkeys are getting too fat

Note: Rations vary. Adjustments may be necessary if the turkeys are not responding properly. Your 4-H leader, county agent, or feed dealer can advise you.

Water is as essential as feed. A flock of 25 turkeys may need the following amount of water each day. The amount needed depends on their size, feed source, and the weather.

Age of turkeys	Amount of water needed
0 to 4 weeks	1/2 to 1 gallon
4 to 8 weeks	1 to 2 1/2 gallons
8 to 12 weeks	2 to 3 gallons
16 or more weeks	3 to 5 gallons.

*Note: Turkeys may double their water consumption if being fed salts or electrolytes in water.



An automatic feeder dispenses feed to turkeys in a commercial house.

150TM Turkey, Market Interview Questions

Please remember to keep in mind the age and year of member being interviewed. Use two or three of these or similar standard questions as *part* of the interview judging process.

1. How much do mature, commercial, live turkeys usually weigh?
Hens grow to live weights of 16-18 pounds at 14 weeks.
Toms grow to live weights of 34-39 pounds at 18 weeks.
2. What does the term "feed conversion" mean?
It is a measure of how efficiently a bird converts feed into weight (how much weight your birds are gaining on the feed you are providing).
3. When raising turkeys for meat, why should you separate the hens from the toms after four months of age?
Because toms' growth rate is much faster than hens, and toms are marketed earlier.
4. What is the accepted commercial type of turkey to raise for market classes at the fair?
Broad Breasted Whites (also called Large White or White Holland).
5. What should the temperature under the brooder be during poults first week of life?
95°F.
6. About how much feed does it take to raise the average Large White tom turkey to an age of 18 weeks?
92 pounds.
7. What two diseases might turkeys get if raised with chickens?
Sinusitis and Blackhead.
8. Name at least one way to try to control cannibalism in turkeys?
Beak remodeling, increased floor space, improved nutrition, or proper lighting.
9. What defects lower the final placing of a turkey?
(1) General defects such as cuts and tears; (2) Broken or disjointed bones; (3) Skin or flesh bruises anywhere other than on the wing tip; (4) Blisters or calluses on the breast; (5) Insect bites; (6) External parasites; (7) Extremely dirty birds; (8) Pendulous crop.
10. State and federal laws regulate the processing of poultry for sale. Are you allowed to sell your home-grown and possibly home-processed turkeys? Explain.
Yes, as limited direct sales of home-grown and home-processed turkeys may be exempt from state and federal laws. Local city or county health departments or the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Meat Inspection can provide details.



❖ General Information

- A poult is a baby turkey
- Days it takes to hatch poults
- Most expensive cut of meat off a turkey
- Be able to explain why this turkey came to the fair

❖ Transporting

- Rubbermaid storage tote
- Large dog kennel
- Truck with a cap
- Livestock trailer
 - MAKE SURE TO HAVE A SOLID BOTTOM

❖ Varieties of Turkeys

- Broad Breasted Bronze
- Broad Breasted White
- Black
- Bourbon Red
- Bronze
- Narragansett
- Royal Palm
- Slate
- Beltsville Small White
- White Holland

❖ Know Your Feed

- Know the brand and the exact kind you feed
 - "Turkey Starter" is not an answer
- Know the percent of protein and fat in your feed
- Know the first five ingredients in your feed
- Know where you buy it
- Know the cost of a 50 pound bag
- Know if your feed is medicated

❖ Raising Your Turkey

- Feed
- Ventilation
- Lighting (use red bulbs if the flock seems to be fighting or picking on others)
- Vitamins/Electrolytes
- Predators
- Housing

❖ Parts Of The Head

- Snood
- Beak
- Nostrils
- Eye
- Eye Ring

- Ear
- Face
- Wattles
- Caruncles
- Neck

❖ Feathers of The Wings

- Front
- Bow
- Bar
- Secondaires
- Coverts
- Primaries

❖ Parts of a Feather

- Vane
- Shaft
- Barb
- Afterfeather
- Downy barbs
- Hollow Shaft Quill

❖ Parts of The Leg

- Leg
- Hock
- Shank
- Spur
- Foot
 - 3 forward toes
 - 1 hind toe
 - Toe nails
 - Webbing
 - Pad

❖ Diseases

- Know at least 2
- Know at least 2 internal parasites
- Know at least 2 external
- Know how to treat the above diseases/parasites

❖ Judging the Bird

- The Breast
 - Length, width, free of fat
- The Wings
 - NO tears, bruises, broken bones
- The Wings
 - NO breaks, cuts

❖ Judging the Bird isn't focused on

- Ear
- Face
- Wattles
- Caruncles
- Neck
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- Gender
- Color
- Leg Color
- Skin Color
- Face Color
- Broken Tail Feathers
- Broken Wing Feathers
- ❖ Getting Ready
 - Bring your turkey to fair clean
 - You will be expected to flip your turkey
 - Know how to display your turkey
- ❖ Washing your Turkey
 - Rubbermaid tub
 - Kiddie pool
 - Towels
 - Hair dryer
 - Hair soaps or dish soap
 - Toothbrush
 - Oil for the head
- ❖ Know your Bird
 - Know the specific variety of the turkey you have
 - Know the specific age of your turkey
 - EXAMPLE: "My turkey is _____ weeks or _____ days old."
 - Know where you bought your turkey
 - Know the price of your turkey
 - What did you do to prepare for the show
- ❖ In the Show Ring
 - Keep the turkey between you and the judge
 - Eye contact with the judge
 - NO TALKING, only to the judge when he is talking to you
- ❖ Something you would improve
 - Make it something about the meat on your turkey. Why?
 - The feathers don't matter when judging
- ❖ Know a Meal, Promote your Finished Product
 - Ground Turkey
 - Ground Sausage
 - Turkey Burger
 - Turkey Brats
 - Turkey Dogs
 - Turkey Breasts
 - Dog Food
 - Turkey Bacon
 - Turkey Pepperoni

